



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### AMERICAN ALLIGATOR RECOVERS; OTHER SPECIES RECEIVE PROTECTION

The American alligator is doing so well that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has removed it from its list of endangered species, according to the animal a less restrictive legal status. However, 12 other species of animals and plants in need of protection have recently been added to that list.

"This alligator success story is the culmination of a 20-year effort by Federal and State wildlife professionals to bring the animal back," said Frank Dunkle, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "When the alligator was first protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1967, poaching had reduced its numbers so severely that many believed the species would never recover. But with sound management and a vigorous crackdown by State and Federal wildlife law enforcement agents, we've reversed the situation. Today, the American alligator is biologically secure throughout its range."

Species newly protected under the Endangered Species Act include the Mount Graham red squirrel, found only within the Coronado National Forest of southeastern Arizona. It has been listed as endangered. The Alabama red-bellied turtle, a freshwater species that inhabits the lower floodplain of the Mobile River System in Alabama, has also been designated as endangered.

Listed as threatened are: the Florida scrub jay, found in small pockets on the Florida peninsula; the blackside dace, a brightly-colored fish that inhabits small streams in southeastern Kentucky and northeastern Tennessee; and the flattened musk turtle, another freshwater turtle found in Alabama.

In addition, seven plant species have been listed--the Sacramento Mountains thistle (New Mexico), rough-leaved loosestrife (North and South Carolina), Geocarpon minimum (Arkansas and Missouri), Jesup's milk-vetch (Vermont and New Hampshire), running buffalo clover (West Virginia), elfin tree fern (Puerto Rico), and Cook's holly (Puerto Rico).

All of these final listing actions appeared in the Federal Register between June 3, 1987, and June 16, 1987.

(More)

In 1986, 45 animal and plant species were added to the endangered species list. So far in 1987, 37 more species have been listed, bringing to 449 the total number of U.S. species that receive such protection by the Federal Government.

Listing a species as "endangered" means that it is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A "threatened" listing means that a species is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

After a species is listed, a recovery plan is drawn up by the Fish and Wildlife Service with the cooperation of experts from State and Federal agencies, universities, and other knowledgeable organizations. The plan identifies activities such as research, habitat conservation, or increased law enforcement, that are specifically tailored to the recovery needs of that species.

"Listing is one step in bringing a species back from the brink of extinction, but we must not lose sight of the fact that recovery is our ultimate goal," said Director Dunkle. "We have achieved that with the alligator."

The Fish and Wildlife Service has reclassified alligator populations in seven States--Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. The action changes the species' listing from "endangered" or "threatened" to "threatened by similarity of appearance." This designation can be used for animals that have recovered, but that closely resemble other species that are endangered. In this case, it is designed to prevent any illegal trade of protected crocodilian species. Similarity of appearance provisions allow strictly regulated hunting, but impose rules to ensure that these hunts will not jeopardize the species and that the meat, leather, and other goods from legally-taken animals are clearly identifiable.

The Fish and Wildlife Service previously reclassified alligators in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, which comprise most of the reptile's range. In these States, alligators have become so numerous that, in certain locations, controlled harvests have been undertaken.

The alligator is one of the most difficult species to census because of its wide distribution throughout the Southeast and its solitary and nocturnal habits. No comprehensive national population estimates exist for the species, although night counts along waterways show a remarkable increase in the number of alligators in most Southern States. In Alabama, for instance, biologists reported a ten-fold increase in large alligators between the mid-1970's and the early 1980's. South Carolina showed an increase of 1,633 percent during the same period.